

TRIE



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Alice: A ram skull

Nicholas: Mothmen Missionary

Sean: A skull

Justice: Emo Splodge

willow: the london blitz

Jay: Incendiary Broccoli

J: YOUR parents fighting.

Leo: funyarinpa

Mia: Cocaine Bear holding up double peace signs

Teddy: Gundam

Lucas: Bleeding Doritos

María: Cerberus' Goat Fursona

Front Cover: Willow Watson

Back Cover: J.E. Cramer

Submissions are due always, constantly, so submit forever. You can submit in any format (no PDFs please) by CD, Flash Drive, singing telegram, carrier pigeon, paper airplane, Fed-Ex, Pony Express, or email. Get your submissions to omen@hampshire.edu, the Omen Office, Leo's mailbox (1593), or Jay's mailbox (0370).

Policy

The Omen is an every-other-week-ly publication that is the world's only example of the consistent application of a straightforward policy: we publish all signed submissions from members of the Hampshire community that break neither the law nor the Hampshire College Student Handbook. Send your impassioned yet poorly-thought-out rants, self-insertion fanfiction, MS Paint comics, and whiny emo poetry to omen@hampshire.edu; we'll publish it all, and we're happy to do it. The Omen is about giving you a voice, no matter how little you deserve it. Since its founding in December of 1992 by Stephanie Cole, the Omen has hardly ever missed an issue, making it Hampshire's longest-running publication.

Your Omen submission (you're submitting right now, right?) might not be edited, and we can't promise any spellchecking either, so any horrendous mistakes are your fault, not ours. We do promise not to insert comical spelling mistakes in submissions to make you look foolish.

Your submission must include the name you use around campus: an open forum comes with a responsibility to take ownership of your views. Views expressed in the Omen do not necessarily reflect the views of the Omen editor, the Omen staff, or anyone, anywhere, living or dead.

The Omen staff consists of whoever shows up for Omen layout, which take place every other Friday at 7:00 p.m. in the basement of Merrill A. You should come and answer the staff box question. We don't bite. You can find the Omen every other Monday in Saga, the post office, online at expelallo.men, and just about any other place we can find to put it.

Find all issues here!



Views in the Omen (5)

Do not necessarily (7)

Reflect the staff's views (5)

THE WINNER OF THE
OMEN'S EROTICA
CONTEST, 2023, IS...

MALFOY

KIMMEL

!!!

congrats, malfoy :-)

EDITORIAL

AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH

2

by Leo Zhang

Before I start telling this story, I have to say that it’s been two weeks since this debacle and it’s still haunting me. I genuinely felt like I may be losing my mind. Before I start telling this story, I also have to disclaim that what happened is probably not deserving of this much energy and thought on my part. Cool? Okay, cool.

Two weeks ago, on February 15th, I went to the Bridge after my evening class, being too sleepy to make food myself. While there, I took a look in the ice cream fridges, and found a product I’d never seen at the Bridge before. It was an ice cream bar—you know, those ice-cream-on-a-stick things that are coated in a shell of chocolate?—with “Private Stock” written on the packaging in big, bold, black letters. The packaging also featured one of those red arrows used to depict a share’s trade price. You know, those arrows that go up and down a bunch of times in accordance with the stock’s price? Also, in the background, there were faint stock prices. Like, numbers. (I also have to disclaim that I don’t know anything about the stock market and its associated terminology, so if I misuse anything or have any wrong info, please forgive me.)



so little about the contents of the ice cream that the Buttery Pie Crust came as a surprise. A pleasant surprise, you may ask? No, not really. Just a surprise. Third of all, the stick was lopsided when it was shoved into the ice cream, which was just really funny to me.

While I was having a mini crisis over the consumption experience I was undergoing, Jay was looking up Private Stock ice cream bars on his phone. I watched curiously, also desperate to know what the fuck was up with these ice cream bars.

Jay could not find evidence of Private Stock ice cream bars existing.

I was completely baffled, and pointed it out to Jay, who was with me at the time. He, too, was just as confused. Neither of us had ever seen a product, much less an ice cream bar, being marketed with stocks as its gimmick. So of course I bought one of the things. I didn’t even look to see what kind of ice cream it was, because that was secondary to how fucking funny it was.

I ate the ice cream bar that night. I need to describe my sensory experience of eating this bar but I don’t know if any description could ever do justice to what it actually felt like. First of all, I took it out of its packaging and it was fully brick-shaped. Like, it was square. You know how ice cream bars are usually ovular, and usually thin enough to bite into them without much effort being needed? This was not that. When I say brick-shaped, I mean it. I have a pretty small mouth, and I had to fully unhinge my jaw like a snake to be able to take a bite. Second of all, there was what I had assumed to be cake inside. If I had read the description on the packaging, this would not have caught me off guard, as the packaging touts that it contains “buttery pie crust,” but I cared

Their Google searches were absolutely fruitless. Only spurred on by this setback, we went to the website of Private Stock’s parent company—or, at least, what I assume is their parent company—Royal. There was both a logo and a link on the packaging that led us to Royal, you see, except this search ended up being just as useless as the last. Royal has a website where they list their products, none of which mentioned Private Stock. There was no mention of ice cream bars of any kind, actually. We looked through all their product pages, and we thought we might have some luck scouring the “Retail Packaging” section, but still. Nothing. We did find dessert specialties of theirs called “Real Lemon” and “Real Orange,” though, which at the time made me laugh so hard I stumbled over my own feet while standing completely still.

This Royal website was definitely the one that was put on the Private Stock ice cream bar packaging. Yet, still no sign of Private Stock existing. I truly don’t remember how we got to this point, but eventually, Jay did manage to find ONE (1) single piece of evidence on the Internet that Private Stock ice cream bars exist at all. It was a link to an Instacart page that supposedly sold Private Stock ice cream bars. Hopeful, we clicked on the link.

Out of stock.
AND no product image.
W H A T

At some point during all of this, we’d also stumbled across a website called [privatestockonline.com](#). It is completely unrelated to the ice cream bars in every way, but it’s such a weird fucking website that I NEED to talk about it because it’s, like, half the reason I think Private Stock ice cream bars are cursed.

Private Stock Premium Boutique is an online store (that does have a few in-person locations, I think, but none in Massachusetts) that sells items from, like, actual brands. Adidas, Chinatown Market, Jordan, Nike, Reebok, Takashi Murakami, and Yeezy are the ones I recognize among the many. These products are sold for RIDICULOUSLY high prices. I’m talking \$450 for a zip-up hoodie. Not \$4.50, not \$45.00. FOUR HUNDRED AND FIFTY ENTIRE DOLLARS for a zip-up hoodie. \$100 for a beanie. \$120 for a pair of socks. \$535 for a crystal stone necklace. You get the deal. When we stumbled across the website, the first few products we saw all had “THAT’S AN AWFUL LOT OF COUGH SYRUP” on them, and I later realized that “That’s an Awful Lot of Cough Syrup” is a brand name, but before knowing that, I genuinely thought I was losing my mind.¹

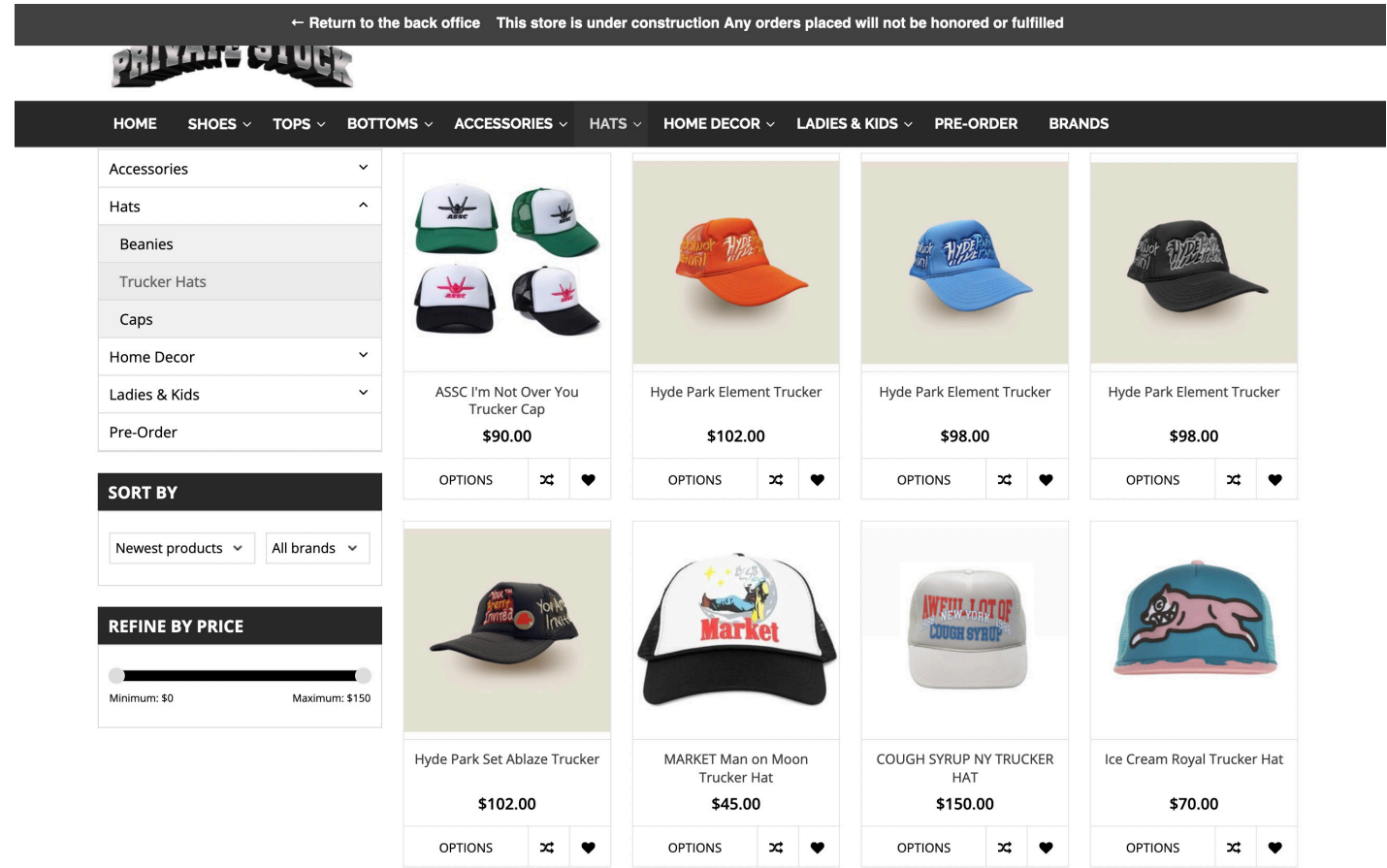
Jay and I then chose to investigate the website on separate computers. They investigated the banner at the top of the website that says “<— Return to the back office” on the left and “This story is under construction Any orders placed will not be honored or fulfilled” on the right, while I investigated their customer service pages.

Jay’s findings: Clicking on the “Return to the back office” part took him to a login page for a company called Lightspeed, which is “a point-of-sale and e-commerce software provider”—in other words, he’s pretty sure that login page is an actual backdoor entrance to the Private Stock Premium Boutique website. Like, where someone who would want to edit the website would go. Why that button is just out there for the world to click on is beyond me. Also, “Any orders placed will not be honored or fulfilled” is really funny to me, because I cannot fathom what that could possibly mean besides “If you order something, then tough shit, because you’re not getting it.” It’s giving “THIS IS NOT A PLACE OF HONOR” vibes, but less cool.

My findings: Every Private Stock Premium Boutique customer service page (besides their “Payment methods” and “Sitemap” pages) capitalizes seemingly arbitrary words. For example, “Goods”

¹ After checking [privatestockonline.com](#) again, I realized that the brand name is actually “That’s a Awful Lot of Cough Syrup,” not “That’s an Awful Lot of Cough Syrup,” which makes it a lot worse. Like, unbelievably worse.

and “Service” and “Device” and “You.” Each customer service page also says the following: “The words of which the initial letter is capitalized have meanings defined under the following conditions. The following definitions shall have the same meaning regardless of whether they appear in singular or in plural.” This is then followed by a list of definitions, where the company tells you what they mean when they say “Goods” and “Service” and “Device” and “You,” which leads to such gems like, “Account means a unique account created for You to access our Service or parts of our Service,” and “Country refers to: Texas, United States.” I don’t know why they felt the need to capitalize and define common words. When I first looked at the pages I genuinely thought I was looking at some sort of new religious movement doctrine.



TERMS & CONDITIONS

Home > Terms & conditions

Terms and Conditions
Last updated: December 12, 2020

Please read these terms and conditions carefully before using Our Service.

Interpretation and Definitions

Interpretation

The words of which the initial letter is capitalized have meanings defined under the following conditions. The following definitions shall have the same meaning regardless of whether they appear in singular or in plural.

Definitions

For the purposes of these Terms and Conditions:

- **Affiliate** means an entity that controls, is controlled by or is under common control with a party, where "control" means ownership of 50% or more of the shares, equity interest or other securities entitled to vote for election of directors or other managing authority.
- **Account** means a unique account created for You to access our Service or parts of our Service.
- **Country** refers to: Texas, United States
- **Company** (referred to as either "the Company", "We", "Us" or "Our" in this Agreement) refers to Private Stock, 516 E 6th st, Austin TX 78701.
- **Device** means any device that can access the Service such as a computer, a cellphone or a digital tablet.
- **Goods** refer to the items offered for sale on the Service.
- **Orders** mean a request by You to purchase Goods from Us.
- **Service** refers to the Website.
- **Terms and Conditions** (also referred as "Terms") mean these Terms and Conditions that form the entire agreement between You and the Company regarding the use of the Service.
- **Third-party Social Media Service** means any services or content (including data, information, products or services) provided by a third-party that may be displayed, included or made available by the Service.
- **Website** refers to Private Stock, accessible from <https://private-stock.shoplightspeed.com>
- **You** means the individual accessing or using the Service, or the company, or other legal entity on behalf of which such individual is accessing or using the Service, as applicable.

So, the main takeaway from this tangent is that privatestockonline.com is weird, and extremely unnecessarily expensive. Don’t buy their products. (The reason why their website showed up when we were searching is because they sell products from a brand called “Ice Cream,” by the way.)

This entire website, plus the fact that we couldn’t find evidence of Private Stock ice cream bars existing, made me feel like I was uncovering a very mundane and completely useless but equally all-consuming conspiracy. The last time I felt like this, it was when I found a Jyuto Iruma x reader crotch-stepping smut fanfiction on AO3 while boredom-scrolling, and I later pieced together that it had been a Dazai x Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs) crotch-stepping smut fanfiction that had been repurposed into being a Jyuto x reader fanfiction instead. I felt like I was seeing into the backstage of the universe. The details aren’t important, though if you want to hear more about them, you’re always free to ask. What is important is that I woke up the next day and Queen Elizabeth was dead.

I jokingly commented that maybe whenever I feel like I’m uncovering a stupid but obsession-inducing conspiracy, it’s a premonition that some world leader will die the next day. I was hoping that, if anyone, it would be Charles, but that didn’t happen. What *did* happen is that the night after I ate my first one, something catastrophically bad occurred. I know the tone of this piece so far has been fairly light but this part is serious. I don’t want to go into the incident, but trust me when I say I was left

feeling helpless and clueless and lonely and sick to my stomach. It was bad. So, uh, not exactly at the same level as Lizzy kicking the bucket, but still somewhat intriguing that my theory was sort of half-right, maybe.

Of course, a theory cannot be confirmed off of only one experiment.

So I bought another Private Stock bar. Of course I did. Wouldn't anyone? This second time, on February 18th, I forgot to eat it on the same night that I bought it. I wondered if its effect would still be the same, even if I hadn't eaten it yet. Well, that night, I heard the sound of some animal screeching outside of my window. I know that we have some skunks that live under the mod next door—they used to scavenge in our compost bucket—so I guessed it was probably a skunk. And guess what? It *was* a skunk. You want to know how I know?

THE FUCKING SMELL, OF COURSE

To this day I still wonder what had gotten our skunk friend so agitated that it started screeching like that. It sounded like it was in pain. I hope the little guy's okay. Anyways, Jay had gone off campus so I had to cope with the smell by rapid-fire texting them on Discord with the same amount of both urgency and irritation as when I see a ladybug in my room. I had no way of neutralizing the smell, nor was I particularly fond of the thought of getting out of bed to deal with it, so I just slept like that. The smell faded in 24 hours, I think. But the incident made me start considering another theory, which is as follows:

- 1) If I buy a Private Stock ice cream bar and eat it on the same day, something catastrophically bad will happen the next day. The accursed thing needs time to build up its Evil Beam before it fires at me, of course.
- 2) If I buy a Private Stock ice cream bar and don't eat it on the same day, something moderately upsetting will happen on the day I buy it, and again on the day I eat it. If I split the buying-consuming act in half, the Evil Beam needs half as long to charge up, so its effects are immediate.

And you know what? I WAS RIGHT. Because when Jay came back two days later, I finally ate the ice cream bar I'd bought on February 18th. Within a couple hours we noticed a foul smell invading the house.

ANOTHER FUCKING SKUNK

And this time, the stench was *rancid*. Like, nauseating. This time, we didn't even get a warning; no screeching or anything. The smell spread through the house instantly, and even the upstairs bedrooms, which had previously been spared, fell victim to the stink after only a few minutes. My bedroom was the worst, though, because it's on the first floor and my windows are right next to where the skunks usually appear. Somehow, the smell got so bad in my room that it went from "distinct skunk smell" to "someone left garlic in a pan on the stove and they haven't attended to it in fifteen minutes and now it's stuck to the bottom of the pan and burning." Though garlic smells good, I can assure you this did not. I was actually considering sleeping on the couch just to avoid it. If you know me, you know that if ANYTHING fucks with my sleep, I get extremely grumpy. I need 10+ full hours of uninterrupted, pitch-black-room, totally-silent sleep to feel human in any way, so the fact that I was considering willingly sleeping on the couch, knowing one or both of my modmates would come downstairs and inevitably wake me up in the process, knowing that I would be getting no more than 8 hours, should tell you everything you need to know about how bad the smell was.

I didn't do that, though. Instead I wasted time in the living room until 2 or 3 AM, and by the time I re-entered my room, the smell had faded enough that I thought it wouldn't be worth it to sleep on the

couch. It is important for me to mention that while I was wasting time waiting for the smell to fade, I was texting my family complaining about the situation, and my mother told me that "it really stinks." She then proceeded to tell me explicitly that she was good with puns, as if I wouldn't have clocked "it really stinks" as a pun about skunks otherwise.

The next day, she ordered a gallon of vinegar from Walmart for me to use to neutralize the smell. It worked after a little over a full day of me keeping a bowl of vinegar in my room.

I haven't bought a third Private Stock ice cream bar yet, partially because the weather and my health has kept me from trekking that painful five minutes to the Bridge, and partially because I sort of live in fear of the power of Private Stock. I will absolutely be buying a third one soon, though, if the Bridge still has them. A theory cannot be confirmed off of only two experiments.

Jay and I really, really wanted to email someone in Dining Services to ask about the Private Stock bars—like, where did you even get these from if we can't find them online?—but then we thought it would be funnier for me to write this, and to see if any staff member ends up seeing it and reaching out. We were absolutely planning on emailing the Private Stock Premium Boutique email they provide on their website, though. We wanted to see if we could interview them or something. Just poke and prod at them a bit and ask what the fuck was up with their website, and maybe write an Omen editorial about it. In the end, we didn't do that, though. We forgor. 🐑



The above PENIS BLAST was hand-wiggled for your pleasure by Leo Zhang.

SECTION LIES

Ed Wingenbach
Hampshire College President



Untitled Bing, by Justice Wilson



SECTION SPEAK



Simple Stir Fry

At pretty much any grocery store, you can find a bag of pre-chopped veggies titled something like ‘stir fry medley’. While with these bags, you are paying a bit for convenience, you are getting 5+ vegetables in just the right amount, instead of spending 5x more to buy each individually. Super easy way to get some veggies in and save time cooking!

You will find a recipe on the back of the bag as far as how long to saute the veggies and when to add in protein and sauce but I wanted to throw in a few tips!

A recipe like this is a great time to use canned chicken, you will want to drain it before adding and you will cut the cook time down since all you are going to do is warm the chicken. Same thing here if you are using a meat sub or tofu.

Additionally, you could do this recipe fully from scratch if you want. In the fall, the Farm CSA gives out perfect stir fry veggies and you can make a sauce from scratch too!

Last tip, I am becoming the person who puts their life story before a recipe. But, I would just say, I always keep a stir fry sauce on hand. They also have a recipe on the side of the bottle and if you need to use up veggies or meat, you can throw them in with the sauce and have a really quick, go-to meal!

- Ingredients:
- Bag of veggies
 - Jar of stir fry sauce
 - Protein of choice
 - Rice or noodles - *optional*

Directions:
You are going to start off by cooking your veggies till soft. Anywhere from 5-10 minutes. Then add in your protein and sauce and cook until protein is cooked/warmed.

Recipe Resource

I am keeping today’s tip short and simple by sharing with you *Budget Bytes*. You can find them at budgetbytes.com and also on Instagram. I personally enjoy following food accounts here and there (love following them on Tik Tok too), so that way I can get recipe inspo while doing my daily scrolls. I love this site not only because all their recipes are affordable and give you a breakdown of how much each ingredient, serving and full recipe costs, but also they have a feature where you can change the serving size of a recipe. If you are cooking for yourself, you can bring the serving size down to 2 servings instead of 6, and it does all the math for you!

There is also a super fun feature on the website that says ‘surprise me’ so if you are ever really really stuck on what to make, you just press it and it randomly selects a recipe for you. You may have to press it a few times to get it to not give you brownies when you are looking to cook dinner, but I really enjoy this feature!

Ok, I know I said I was keeping it simple but I promise one last thing. This site also has a how-to section. There are step-by-step guides on how to cut a butternut squash, fry an egg, make homemade sour cream and so much more!

Repurposing Leftovers

Switching up my format a bit to offer a second tip to this submission. When it comes to cooking at home, I know meal prepping sounds intimidating and the thought of eating the same meal over and over just doesn’t sound all too fun. One way I navigate this is by storing components of meals separately. If I am making pasta with a fun homemade sauce, I will keep the sauce separate and the noodles separate so that way if I want to have spaghetti and meatballs for the next meal, I already have the noodles.

I also do this absolutely every single time I make rice because making fried rice is not only super easy, but I always have all the ingredients, and it is best with day-old rice. Knowing that I always can default to fried rice makes prepping a week’s worth of rice feel a lot less bleh.

You can do this with protein, cooking them with basic seasonings and then changing it up when throwing it in with a different recipe.

If cooking one meal to eat for five days straight sounds like the absolute worst, maybe try cooking up separate ingredients so you are able to have meals to fuel yourself when needed! 🐑

Love You, Ya Rat

by BC Reale

This was not what I was going to originally write as my little comeback piece to The Omen but I really need to yell about my feelings considering this whole situation.

To those of you who don't know, Will Wood is an indie music artist who largely wrote music about being horribly horribly broken. About being self destructive, about feeling like you have absolutely no one out there to help you. A lot of his works are known for being bombastic and maybe even a tad edgy. But god damn it, it felt good to just fucking blast. I listened to some of his works during both my middle school and high school years. His music was there for me when I felt like I was going to explode like the worst possible firework. His music told me that it was okay to indulge in anger and frustration from time to time. That sometimes you just needed to let out a scream that you know would wreck you, and possibly disturb your neighbors. But as long as it helped you release a bit of that anger you could only keep secret to you, then it was okay. I am happy to report that I am doing much better now. I hardly need to scream as much. Instead, I can properly express myself to my friends and family and tell them what I am feeling. Which is why it surprised me that I found myself listening to Will Wood again. For a bit of a different reason though. A few months ago, Will Wood released an album called 'In Case I Make It' (Original name being 'In Case I Die'). This album expresses a lot of how Will Wood grew as a person over the years. His recovery from his substance abuse, him admitting and regretting how he hurt the ones he loved, and mourning the loss of others. It's different from his other works. It's not as bombastic but it's still this beautiful whisper of acceptance that resonated deeply with me. If you haven't listened to it, I highly suggest you do (though, maybe have some tissues on standby).

For how beautiful this album is though, it is also potentially Will Wood's last work. With the release of this album he announced that he would be taking an indefinite hiatus from his works to focus on himself. Even though he did phrase it as a 'hiatus' I don't think he'll ever be coming back to make music. That is something I've accepted though. He has shown the most personal parts of himself through his music and is leaving his fans on quite a hopeful note with 'In Case I Make It.' So if all of this is truly said and done for him, then I'm at peace knowing that he will be going on to finally live a life that he can be proud of. It's bittersweet. Like a good cappuccino.

All this to say, thank you Will Wood. I hope you find the peace and confidence that you helped me find with your music.

Love you ya Rat Man. 

The Re-Remaking of a College, Chapter 3: How to Teach Anything Like a Studio Art Class

Special Two-Essays-for-One Deal!!
by Jay Poggi and Ethan Ludwin-Peery

For this issue, we wrote about the same subject without looking at each others work. We've published our essays together to show two different perspectives on what we can learn about teaching from studio art classes.

Jay's Essay

When I was a dumb kid, I thought abstract art was bullshit. I would look at these paintings made of simple, blocky shapes and aimless, squiggly lines and think, "What is this supposed to be?" As I got older, I started to feel like there was something more to this art that I just wasn't getting. So, at the start of my sophomore year, I took an abstract art class that knocked my socks off, balled them up, and threw them into the Moon. I was down one pair of socks, but in just a month, I learned to love abstract art. I came to appreciate color, shape, and composition; I discovered the value of art beyond representation; and I created my own bizarre, messy pieces that are still some of my favorites to this day.

I've been thinking about this class constantly since I started writing about education, and I've realized that studio art classes have this whole "teaching" thing figured out better than just about any other kind of class. I have a feeling that the techniques that make studio art classes so effective could be adapted to work in every other kind of class—and I do mean *every*. Subjects like art, science, and history may seem like they have little in common, but ultimately, all classes are trying to do the same thing: teach a mix of theory (how something works) and skill (how to do something). Studio art classes work so well because they're able to teach both at the same time. They use a couple of different tools to do this, the first of which is the exercise.

Exercises

An exercise is a short activity that treats the student's brain like a muscle (which it basically is). In the same way that lifting weights every day will make it easier for you to lift things, performing some intellectual or creative task every day—whether it's drawing, writing, math-doing, etc—will make that task easier. Repetition is only half of it, though. If you lift weights willy nilly without considering how you're lifting them, you're going to injure yourself. Training your brain is no different (even if the injuries are invisible). To ensure maximum effectiveness, a good exercise requires discipline—in other words, theory.

Take this classic example that just about every intro to drawing class uses to teach hand-eye coordination: the "blind contour drawing." This exercise challenges students to draw a subject from life with the caveat that they cannot take their eyes off that subject—they don't get to see what their drawing looks like until it's done. If the rules of blind contour ended there, it probably wouldn't work; students would have no idea where to start or end, they'd try to capture every element of the subject and overwhelm themselves to the point of retaining nothing. This is where the "contour" part of "blind contour" comes in: for the duration of the exercise, you cannot lift your pencil from the page. This frees students from getting caught up in shading or texture, and allows them to focus entirely on the first of the seven(ish) elements of art, "line." Forbidding pencil-lifting also ensures that, regardless of a student's artistic talent, at least their first several dozen attempts will look extremely silly.¹ This helps

¹ I actually think blind contours look rad, but they don't fit with how a first-time art student likely wants their art to look.

students let go of perfectionistic tendencies that would otherwise get in the way of their learning. Thus, blind contour drawing trains the essential skills of observation and coordination while simultaneously teaching a fundamental piece of art theory.

In order to adapt exercises to other subjects, we need to understand their structure. After stripping away all the drawing from blind contours, I’ve come up with three elements that make up an effective exercise: brevity, restriction, and play.

The brevity of exercises allows them to be repeated, possibly even multiple times in the same class. I don’t think it’s possible to define a range of durations that would work well for all subjects, but in general, a good exercise should be short enough that students can at least do it once every week day, but those that can be repeated several times within a single class can be even better. Blind contour drawings tend to be given in multiple durations, first in one to five-minute “warm-ups,” and then as a longer, twenty to thirty-minute study.

Restrictions keep an exercise’s scope in check and give the students a clear learning goal. Exercises should ideally have enough restrictions that students only have one or two theoretical elements to keep track of, but not so many that they prevent creative expression. In Junko Oba’s Musical Explorations class that I took last year, she gave us compositional exercises where we either wrote a melody to a pre-established harmony, or wrote a harmony for a pre-established melody. This kept the theoretical focus of the assignment narrow, while still allowing us to write music that felt like ours.

Play represents a universal truth about learning that educators and students alike seem to forget past kindergarten: good learning needs to be fun. While everyone’s personal definition of “fun” will vary, I think you can inject playfulness into just about anything by making “failure” not only okay, but unavoidable. Blind contour drawings result, 100% of the time, in artwork that looks at best hilarious and at worst nightmare-inducing, and that’s okay, because learning happens in the process. The product is irrelevant.

Exercises in Other Subjects

To demonstrate how these elements can be used to create exercises in any subject, I’ll share some examples of potential exercises for types of classes that don’t typically employ them.

In humanities classes, students are sometimes expected to write short responses to assigned reading, often in the form of Moodle posts. Much of the time, this feels mostly like a way for the professor to make sure students are actually doing the reading, but with a few tweaks informed by our three elements, I think that these short responses could be turned into an effective analytical exercise. First, we need to define the purpose of the exercise.

One valuable skill in history and literary analysis is the ability to extract an overarching “point” from a reading. To train this skill, we could challenge students to write a summary of the reading’s “point” in as few words as possible. This checks off all three elements; it takes hardly any time, gives students enough restrictions to keep them focused but enough freedom so they can say whatever they want, and encourages students to get silly with their answers (I can imagine some colorful, one-word responses to some of the readings I’ve been assigned at Hampshire). This exercise could also serve as a great way for professors to start in-class discussions. I find that starting a discussion with a “What did you think of the reading?” tends to intimidate students because of how vague it is. Asking them to share their mini-summaries could provide some much-needed structure and fun.

Of course, there’s a lot more to analysis than big-picture point-extraction. If we turn the mini-summary activity inside-out, we get an exercise that trains another important skill: the ability to find meaning in little details. In this exercise, students pick a single sentence of a reading to analyze. Then, they write as many observations as they can in under one minute. If a student’s chosen sentence con-

tains any subtext or remarkable stylistic choices, they’ll likely have found them by the end of this time period; but even if they haven’t, they’ll have gained a sharper awareness for subtle detail.

Science classes could use exercises to help students internalize the scientific method. Professors could ask their students to perform daily, thirty-minute experiments testing whatever they want, as long as they identify independent and dependent variables, make a hypothesis, and use deliberate, repeatable methods. These experiments could test something as stupid as “the relationship between the kind of noise I make at my modmate and the kind of noise they make back at me.” As with all these exercises, the point is the process, not the product.

Game design classes fit pretty effortlessly into the studio art format. Just have students make little games in a limited amount of time with limited resources (e.g. make a new game out of a checkerboard and some checkers in thirty minutes).

Language classes are a bit of a strange case (and not just because Hampshire doesn’t offer them anymore [frowny face]). Most classes seem to primarily emphasize conversational and writing skills, and they tend to do a pretty good job of using exercises to train those skills, but I wonder if they’re the wrong skills to train, at least at the start. In my experience, learning comprehension and phonetics has played a much more significant role in the long term development of my proficiency in any given language. Effective exercises for training phonetics already exist in advanced language classes, but I’ve rarely encountered an exercise designed to train comprehension.² My high school’s French curriculum occasionally gave us these listening challenges where the teacher would play a video of people talking in French, and afterwards we’d have to discuss what we understood. They’d replay it several times until we were able to follow most of it. These were super helpful, but my teachers made use of them at most once a week. I think we should have been doing them every day.

By making regular use of thoughtfully-designed exercises, teachers can help their students quickly develop a strong technical and theoretical foundation in a subject. Once this foundation is established, it’s time to give the students a chance to do something with it.

Projects

Practically all Hampshire classes involve projects, but there are a couple features that distinguish the kind used in studio art classes. In most classes, projects give students a chance to practice combining all the skills and theory-elements they’ve learned throughout the class. The projects used in art classes differ in that they require the student to use only those skills and theory-elements that they’ve learned in the class.

Compare a drawing class that asks students to draw something for their final project to a literary analysis class that asks students to write an essay. To complete their final drawing, art students will have to put together their physical coordination, spatial awareness, and understanding of the elements of art—all things they’ve been training throughout the class. To write a final essay, on the other hand, literature students have to use the analytical skills they’ve been training along with their skill in essay writing, which they have most likely not been training throughout the class—at least, not effectively.

Most classes that involve writing essays, even those that require multiple essays, don’t actually teach their students how to write essays. Instead, they use essays because, unlike art, the subject they’re teaching doesn’t automatically generate a tangible “product.” Where drawing creates a picture you can hold, look at, and have feelings about, something like literary analysis happens in your head—it requires some sort of vehicle to exist in the world. So, when designing a project, in which students work

² I’m not counting discussions with classmates as comprehension practice. The ability to decipher what your fellow newbie language-learners are trying to say is a completely different skill from understanding native or fluent speech.

for an extended period of time to *create* something, professors have to decide what vehicle students will use to deliver their work. An essay may seem like the obvious choice, but because essay-writing is its own skill, a class that requires essays ought to teach that skill. I understand that expecting every class to teach essay-writing on top of whatever else it teaches might not be realistic,³ in which case I propose that professors allow their students to communicate their learning through whatever vehicle they choose. That way, the project only requires the use of skills and knowledge that students gained in the class, and they can deliver the product through whatever method they’re most comfortable with, be it a piece of music, a comic, or indeed, an essay.

The other major feature that distinguishes studio art projects from most other projects is that the resulting product has value to the student outside its purpose in class. Where exercises can get away with producing something that doesn’t really matter to the student (I can’t say I spend much time thinking about the blind contour drawings I’ve done), projects take so much time that students need to care about the thing they’re creating for them to be willing to dedicate that time. This motivation is basically a given in an art class; it’s safe to assume that students taking the class want to make art, and every project will let them do exactly that. Other classes aren’t likely to have students with such similar interests. A student might take a history class to practice writing research papers, but they just as likely might take it to inform the worldbuilding of a novel they’re writing, or simply to give themselves a fuller picture of the world.

The most straightforward way to ensure students are getting some kind of personal value out of their projects is to let them come up with their projects themselves. If, for whatever reason, the project has to be designed by the professor, they should make sure that they’re designing it for optimum learning, not easy assessment. I’ve taken so many classes where the projects felt like nothing more than a tool for the professor to use to assess us. In a class like this, turning in a project feels like hurling it into a pit. In the future, while I might think about the subject I learned about, I’ll never think about the thing I made. Once it’s been evaluated by the teacher, it’s served its purpose.

When I finish a project in the studio art style, I have intense feelings about it. I might be proud of it, or I might hate it. I might have the urge to continue working on it, or I might want to leave it far behind me. But I’ll always remember it. I’ll always keep it neatly framed in my mental portfolio of everything I’ve ever made.

Despite how I might have come across in these last few paragraphs, I actually really like writing essays—otherwise you wouldn’t be reading this one. I just think we need to reevaluate their place in education.

Meet me back here in 58.4 for the next chapter of *The Re-Remaking of a College* where I’ll be discussing... Shit, I don’t know yet. I’m sure I’ll think of something.

³ On the other hand, with a well-designed exercise, anything’s possible.

Ethan’s Essay

Studio art classes help students develop art skills by using many different kinds of constrained practice.

A beginner art student doesn’t yet have the skill to complete an entire project. They must learn each skill one by one before they can do work on their own. Even for an advanced student or master, it can still be helpful to train the skills in isolation, for the same reason that a pro athlete would train muscle groups in isolation.

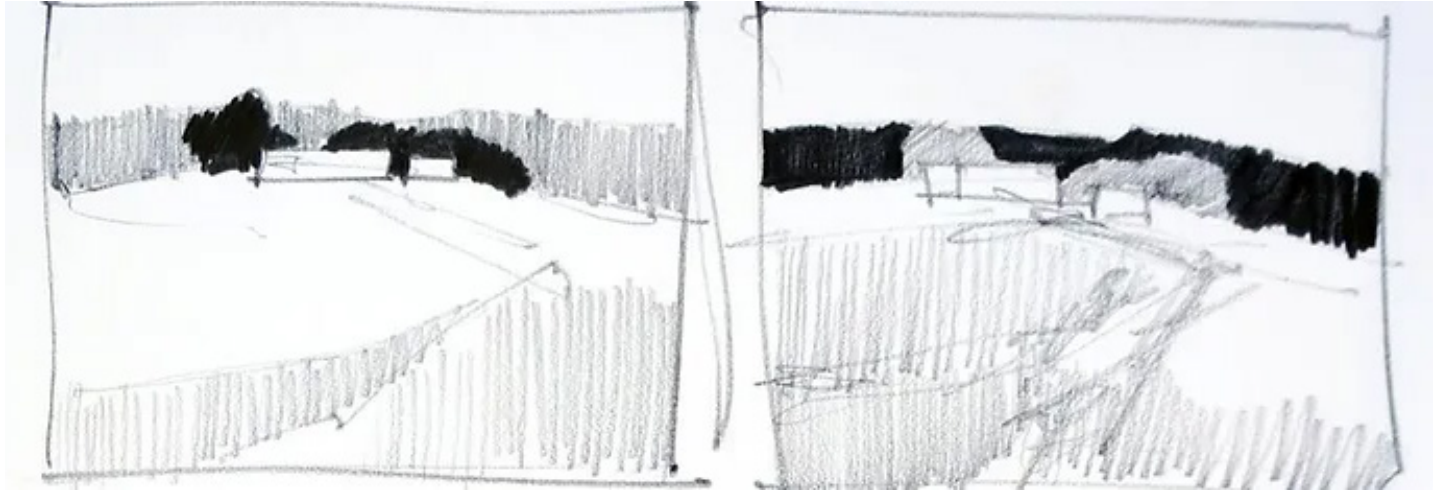
A piece of art cannot be wholly successful unless all the components are successful, and unless they all work together in harmony. So the artist needs to understand what the components of their art are, and must practice each of them in isolation and in combination.

For example, we can consider the visual arts. A painting or drawing takes some time to complete, happens across some amount of canvas, uses some kind of media, and is done with some kind of technique.

Limiting the amount of time gives you **timed practice**, or if the time is short enough, **gesture drawings**.



Limiting the amount of canvas gives you **thumbnail sketches**.



Limiting the media doesn't usually have a name, but might be called a **media study**. This is what you see in cases like coffee paintings or inktober.



There are also various forms of **technique study**, like the infamous “one line” task or contour portraits, where you make a drawing without lifting your pen.



Conceptually, the visual arts include ideas of (among many other things; this list is not exhaustive) value, hue, abstraction, and composition.

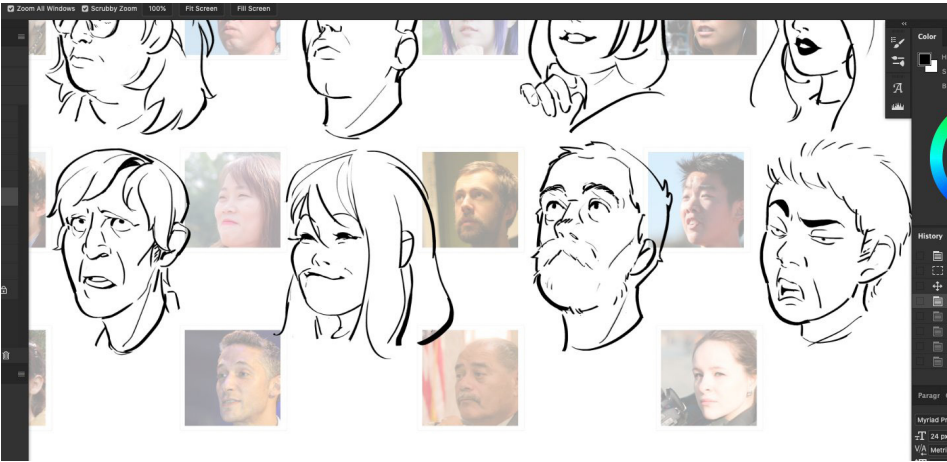
Limiting yourself to just value gives you a **value study**, where the piece is done without hue.



Limiting yourself by hue (or saturation) isn't commonly done, but the same idea applies.



You practice abstraction by doing **life drawing** and working with **references**.



You can practice composition with large blocking studies (much like a value study or thumbnail).



Finally, you can practice everything BUT composition by simply copying someone else’s work as closely as possible. In painting we call this a **master study**.



You can also do other forms of master studies. The simplest form of master study is just tracing! Don’t believe the haters — **tracing is great practice for beginners**, as long as it’s not the only thing you do. More advanced forms of master study include this unusual approach I recently saw, where they applied an artist’s lighting and rendering style to a new subject:



Naturally you can do any kind of combination of these things. You can do a value study of a master study. You can do a hue thumbnail. The point is simply that in studio art we identify different skills (practical and conceptual) and then we practice them in various forms of isolation, either by practicing just one skill (a value study is just value) or everything but one skill (a master study is everything but composition) or some other combination (a thumbnail is usually both very small and also just value, no hue, tends to focus on composition).

To me it seems like you could do the same thing for any other skill. You just need to figure out how to break it down into its constituent parts and then find ways to practice those parts in isolation.

The master study seems like it can be applied to almost any discipline. If you want to be a rock-star, it’s hard to beat re-recording some of your favorite songs as closely as possible. How did they get

that particular weird sound that you love? If you really want to get better at filmmaking, it’s hard to beat making a shot-for-shot remake of some of your favorite scenes.



For example, if you look at this shot closely you can see that in the original film, the actors are greenscreened in!

As with visual arts, this takes composition out of your hands so you can focus on everything else. If you try to make your copy as exact as possible, you will be able to see exactly where your skills and understanding fall short of the masters. And often you will end up realizing why they did things the way they do.

You may have to modify this for some disciplines. In painting and film you can stare directly at the original artwork, but if you do a master study of *Moby Dick*, you will just be transcribing it directly (which might also be good practice, but practice of a different kind in my opinion).

So to do a master study of a fiction author, you might instead spend 5 minutes reading a page or two of Jane Austen and then later try to re-create it as closely as possible. Or for screenwriting, you might watch a movie in class, and next class the professor would ask you to re-create the dialogue from one of the scenes. For skills where you can just memorize the whole original work exactly, like poetry, you might have to get more creative.

In science we call master studies “replication”. Right now, I am teaching a course called *CS-0232 Hampshire College Butchers the Psychology Classics* where we are going to replicate a bunch of classic psychology studies. To me this looks a lot like a studio arts psychological science methods course, just one that happens to focus on master studies over other kinds of studio art practice.

Timed practice seems like it can also be adapted to almost any discipline. The only difference is how long you time things for. In visual arts a gesture drawing can be as short as a couple seconds, but if you’re teaching a video came course, a “gesture video game” probably would be closer to 48 hours.

Pedagogically this is also a good way to ramp things up. Once students have their basic skills, have them do a few timed studies that are as short as possible. Then gradually give them longer and longer timed studies until they are working on actual projects of reasonable length.

From here, the disciplines diverge. Value is important to all visual arts, not only painting but also photography, cinematography, etc. Even so, value has no bearing on disciplines like nonfiction writing, acting, or choreography. But you can still practice these skills in a studio arts fashion, by developing constrained practice techniques that focus on particular elements of these skills in isolation.

Let’s take a look at some examples. The biggest skill distinction in writing is between writing and

editing. Not all editors are writers, but all writers edit their own work, so editing is a skill that all writers should have.

In his book *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain: In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life*, George Saunders’ describes what he calls “a cutting exercise”. He gives you a short fiction passage of 600 words. The passage is quite sloppy — it is crammed with too much detail and kind of rambles all over the place.

First he asks you to set a timer for 5 minutes and to cut 20 words from the text in that time. He asks you to reflect on what you cut, why you cut it, and whether that made the piece better or worse.

Then he asks you to do the same thing again, cutting 20 more words.


Then he asks you to keep cutting words, 20 at a time, until you’ve cut it back to half its original length, 300 words.

Since editing and, in particular, cutting, are essential skills in all forms of writing, this seems like a powerful exercise. Saunders has a lot to say about the exercise, of course, but for now I’ll share just this snippet:

Extreme cutting like this is a gateway to voice. Let’s say there are two phases in writing (although these tend to morph in and out of each other): composition and revision. We tend to associate voice with the first (“I just burst out my first draft in my true voice, singing out my spontaneous vision!”). But, in my experience, voice really gets made during the second phase—as we edit and, especially, as we cut.

I don’t think all skills should be taught like a studio art class, there’s no way that this method fits everything. When I taught statistics in the past, I didn’t teach it like a studio art class, though that might be interesting to try at some point.

But I do think that more classes should be taught as skill-based classes. If you want students to learn a skill, you should teach it to them, not just hope they pick it up by example or by osmosis.


And teachers should be aware of what they can learn from studio art classes. 

a needlessly complicated story about developing musical taste (part 3)

by willow watson

in april 2021, i went to florida with my scout troop, to spend a week on a sailboat exploring the keys. in the days leading up to our flight, i had packed everything i’d thought i’d need to occupy my time - *lord of the flies*, the book & lyrics of *hair*, a deck of playing cards, & a personal journal - but upon my arrival at the airport, i realized i had missed one crucial detail: i hadn’t downloaded any music onto my phone, & i’d have nothing to listen to on the plane. while my troop waited to be allowed onto our flight, i hurriedly threw together a playlist of random songs i’d discovered over the last few months, altogether totalling an hour & twenty-five minutes. somehow, that smattering of songs lasted me the whole trip, providing the soundtrack to touching down in fort lauderdale, riding in a crowded van for hours to the base camp, cooking while i was seasick, meandering around key west, staying up on anchor watch while everyone else was asleep, & slowly but surely having my soul crushed by my inability to shave. i’d decided against bringing a razor through airport security, & while it seemed like a good idea at the time, by the end of the week my world was collapsing around me. i’d been feeling consciously dysphoric for months beforehand (& unconsciously for who knows how much longer), but it wasn’t until the seabase trip that i was finally forced to confront how much torment it was causing me. up to that point, i had resolved to repress & ignore those feelings, & i fully intended to go the rest of my life without ever mentioning or acting on them. but seabase broke me, & as i shaved my face after returning home, i realized that i had to transition, deciding at that moment that i would do so, no matter what.

being who i am, of course, it wasn’t that easy, & i made a new resolution: to wait a year without acting on that decision to be sure that it was exactly what i wanted. that meant, too, that i wouldn’t come out to anyone during that time, or even give the slightest hint about anything. still, i wanted some outlet for my excitement over my revelation, & i found it in music. inspired by the playlist i had made the month before & the way it had perfectly captured one point in time, i started making another to record the sound of coming to terms with myself. now that i could acknowledge what i was experiencing, i sought out music by transgender artists, feeling like everything i found spoke to me in a way i had never felt before, & more importantly that it spoke to that moment in my life. i was thrilled to have a concrete way of storing how i had felt & seen things at such a major turning point, & i realized that i could continue making new playlists monthly to document how i felt throughout my early transition. committed to doing so, i slowly became obsessed, spending more & more time narrating my own life through my music as i grew detached from everyone else.

so while i stayed closeted, the monthly playlists became a firmly ingrained habit, helping me to understand myself & carrying me through all the difficulties i faced over the next year. they became as much a part of my memories as the events they were meant to bring to mind, their names becoming the titles for chapters of my life & their descriptions filling in for my actual recollections. while they sometimes distorted my memories, they were invaluable to me as a means of holding onto my new views of myself, which were constantly shifting as things changed around me month by month. they gave me music that reminded me of tasting independence in asheville in july, coming out to my parents ahead of schedule in august, distancing myself at my cousin’s wedding in november, & counting down to the date i could start hormones in december. it brought me through enormous highs (“climax! - passing notes”) & terrible disappointments (“round two.”), resignation (“well & truly (burnt) out”) & new excitement (“submit to the omen”). even at this point, my monthly playlists warp my perception of what is most significant to me, or what each month means alongside all the rest. yet they remain my favorite way of taking in new music - possibly because my memories add meaning to the songs every bit as much as the other way around. 



Dear Hampshire Students,

Greetings from your Dean of Students - Dr. Zauyah Waite! Here’s the 2nd issue of the monthly From A to Z e-letter. I hope this direct communication with you shares pertinent info that enhances your student experience and also communicates the call to doing our part in building a kind and caring community. Additionally, I hope you will feel empowered to touch base with me directly with any concerns, pushbacks or ideas that will assist Student Affairs serve you in a way that exceeds your expectations.

THE ACADEMIC SIDE - HAMPSHIRE IS PROGRESSING WELL IN BUILDING THE COLLEGE UP
FYI - Hampshire College is doing a major hiring initiative across its curriculum with 9 full-time positions in a variety of fields. These include 2 positions in Film/Photo/Video, 1 position in Studio Arts, 1 position in Animation, 1 position in Native American and Indigenous Studies, 2 positions in Data Science/Mathematics, an Endowed Professorship in Applied Ethics and an Endowed Professorship in Environmental Education. Applicants should visit <https://lnkd.in/gNCB3seF> for details on each position. For any inquiries please contact: deanoffaculty@hampshire.edu (or just dof@hampshire.edu).

CREATING POSITIVE CHANGE - LET’S DO OUR PART
a joint message from Community Advocacy and Restorative Practices (CARP), Dean of Students Office, Residence Life and Student Engagement - We strive to build a welcoming community with all of you. In this spirit, we aim to support what each of you bring and contribute to our environment. This semester we have seen an unfortunate increase in derogatory rumors, hurtful gossip, and slanderous accusations about and directed toward different Hampshire community members. We understand and wholeheartedly embrace that human nature is inquisitive; a quality embedded in the Hampshire motto *Non Satis Scire* - “To Know Is Not Enough”. However, we must do so with care and respect for one another, even in the midst of conflict, disappointment and frustration.

Gossips, rumors, shaming and slander are harmful behaviors. These are very hurtful acts and extremely detrimental for the very small student community we are a part of. We are called to create positive change in the world. A part of this is to help form an environment which cares for one another and holds each other accountable. As Mia Mingus, the keynote speaker for the ENGAGE conference, shared last week, accountability consists of four parts: self-reflection, apology, repair, and changed behavior. We encourage all community members to embrace these four components and actively engage in creating change by not making assumptions, refraining from gossip, questioning and dismantling rumors, and not making hurtful comments about one another. Instead, we encourage you to hold others in a positive regard, and when you have or are experiencing harm, please consider the resources available to gain support in repairing or healing from that harm. Hampshire College remains committed to meeting you where you are at in navigating any interpersonal or community obstacles.

Hampshire aspires and has continued on its journey to becoming an antiracist institution. It is imperative to recognize these negative behaviors, whether intentional or not, can be embedded in racism and oppression. Derogatory or defaming statements, accusations, or perceptions we hold about and towards each other only helps to promote systemic racism and harm. As a community, we call upon each other to help

dismantle these systems and encourage one another not to enable these behaviors and actions to disrupt our community.

We are confident that, as a community, we can do better to show each other care, concern, compassion, and forgiveness. By doing so, Hampshire and its community can continue to help change the world and transform higher education. Please join us on this quest.

MASKING STILL ENCOURAGED

According to the policies [announced](#) in December, indoor masking is optional but encouraged. Masking (KN95 or better) remains mandatory for: All indoor academic activities (classes, labs, etc), except when actively presenting; Health Services; The Hampstore; Residents and visitors in “COVID-Strict” housing floors; People with symptoms (stay home until after either a negative PCR test result is returned, or after two negative rapid home antigen tests taken 24 hours apart); Close contacts for 10 days following the last day of exposure and People testing positive for COVID-19, who must mask through day 10 following a positive test, after being cleared to leave formal isolation We urge everyone to wear a mask if requested and respect the health concerns of our community members who are at greater risk. If you have symptoms, please wear a mask even after negative COVID test results, as this will help minimize the potential spread of COVID and also protect people from flu and other viruses causing symptoms. KN95 masks are available at the Dean of Students Office, Merrill (as you enter the side entrance door). Guests to the campus are expected to follow Hampshire’s COVID policies. Rapid antigen tests will be available all semester at both Campus Safety and Wellbeing offices, the Wellness Center, and Health Services. A complete list of current COVID policies may be found [here](#).¹

ARE YOU RUNNING LOW ON TOILETRIES OR ROOM/MOD NEEDS?

Stop by the Campus Safety & Wellbeing office in Dakin Living Center to see if items needed are available, before you go buy it. It’s free to you! We appreciate any feedback you can provide about general needs and community concerns.

HOPE YOU WILL JOIN ME AT THESE ACTIVITIES



MY COMMITMENT - NOW & BEYOND

These past few weeks, turning on the news and learning about the constant acts of brutality, mass-shootings, social and environmental disasters have been rather disheartening, numbing and difficult. And I am not even directly impacted by these crises. My thoughts and prayers are with the people impacted as they face the devastating effects of these catastrophes. I do what I can to help and for the most part it is reaching out to those I am acquainted with to express care and donate to relief organizations that help survivors recover and rebuild. Yet this is far from enough. I know I do not have the power nor the wealth to make a significant change to the crises of the world. What I can do is to be thankful for how blessed I am and be nice to those around me, particularly when they have hurt me - I am going to admit it isn’t easy but it is a challenge I am up for. THANKS for joining me to be better and do better with those who we are in conflict with. you. Have a marvelous month of march and I hope you’ll take time to thank and celebrate the women in your life and the expansive legacies that women across the globe have led and contributed to. 🐑

¹ Editor’s note: check our inside cover for a QR code that’ll take you to the Omen archives site, where you can read a digital version (with clickable links) of every issue!

Love
by Clay Kesling

A single atom
A single grain of sand at the beach
A single droplet in the ocean
A single star upon the galaxy
A single letter in a language
A single note in a song

All endless
All infinite
All surrounded

So sparse
So vast
So indecipherable

An abyss of infinite possibilities
A fossil ingrained in the earth
Semblance of a past not forgotten

Swept me into the clouds
Grasping for the stars
A sea of galaxies

Life is infinite
Love is infinite

To cross between hidden realms
To step into a world of dark
To illuminate
To search
To feel lost
To ache for an answer
To feel lonely
To be sad
To ebb and flow
To rise back to the surface
To fall back down
Just to get back up

Love isn't concrete

It isn't something to grasp and take


It isn't a spot to fill

It is to carry on a search for that which is infinite

To follow a path that gives you life

Love is complex

It shouldn't be easy

Not all can find it and not all will 

The Writing Center
by Malfoy Kimmel

I ate dates by the clear light through the curtains
spitting out the pits into tissue
hearing the wind roar against an old, unfamiliar house.


Before me on the computer screen blinked
the roots and baby branches of a writing project
I've been growing for quite some time now.

Pausing the work to disarm the fruit with my teeth,
I turned off my music also
to listen to the creaks and complaints of northeastern pine

the whirl of the printer, the rumble of voices
downstairs. I felt new words begin to well up in me;
a song to be written for the history and comfort

of a peeling-paint two-story.
I had spent many years writing away from myself
into the fog and gutter-smoke of a fantasy world--

now here rested a smaller prose or poem
that tugged at my shoelaces and begged to be told.

*How many people have dreamed in this room?
Like a bare shell it curves against my ear
and bids me listen to the crash and echo
of the voices and breath and scratch of pencil
that came before me.* 

I’m Afraid to Write

by Leo Zhang

I’m afraid to write.

The logical response to that would be something like, “Aren’t you planning to make a career off of writing?” or “What do you have to be afraid of?” I’ve run through all of the logical responses already, and I’ve realized that logic is not a strong enough leash for the beast that is insecurity.

In the past few weeks, I’ve been in what I can only call a slump. It’s a feeling that I’m sure every artist in every medium—past, present, and future—has experienced, is experiencing, will experience again. The feeling of not being able to create anything, or even worse—not being able to create anything good. Recently, it’s been worse for me than it has been in a long time. I’ve found myself in various writing-centric circles, and I’ve found myself surrounded by skilled artists bursting with creativity, ready to put forth pieces that’ll make me reconsider everything I’ve ever known about writing in less than 2000 words. It’s a nice feeling, to be constantly surrounded by people I can learn from. I can’t read a piece of writing without picking it apart, analyzing it until I can fully put into words what it is that makes it resonate with me so deeply. In these writing-centric circles I am certainly not at a loss for people to look up to—but these people who provide me with so much material to consider, so much artistry to absorb, are the same people who make me feel like I am falling behind, or rather that I am permanently stuck at a level perpetually worse than those around me.

Not that it’s their fault. Of course it isn’t. How could I ever blame someone for being a skilled writer? That’s something to celebrate, not destroy. It’s all me, my thoughts and feelings swelling in my head until there’s no space left for anything else. Because I see the beautiful writing of my peers, how evocative and smooth it is, and all I can think about is how it’s different from my own writing. About how because I think their style is so good, that means my style must not be. I get scared. (Notably, I am the only person who this theory applies to, and I don’t do this whole comparison thing if I’m not part of the equation.)

See, before coming to Hampshire I never actually took any writing classes. I took a few English classes in middle and high school, but I don’t remember those classes well, and there was at least a 50/50 split of writing and literary analysis, if not a ratio closer to 30/70. And when we did write, we rarely focused so intentionally on craft, instead spending all our time just trying to come up with something both coherent and relatively nice to listen to. There was a creative writing club I joined in high school, too, but I don’t remember much of that, either, and it was more of a place to share our work. Not to study, or to refine our skills. All of my writing skills have come from years of isolation, self-inflicted or otherwise—writing over and over and over again with a tiny, unchanging audience. Most of what I wrote was character-related, short scenes with little to no purpose besides being something I thought would be nice. My only audience was my group of online friends, and that friend group has stayed relatively the same over the years, so I haven’t really had fresh outlooks on my writing in a while. I get scared that my online friends are so attached to the characters in my writing that they’ll say my writing is wonderful no matter what, just because they’re emotionally attached to those characters and it hits them harder when one of them cries or is kissed.

I sometimes feel like I’m living in a grand conspiracy that everyone except me knows about. It’s a conspiracy to convince me that my writing is good, by having people in my life tell me that it’s good, when it’s really not. (This would require me to be important enough to whatever higher power is in charge of this plot that such a conspiracy would be deemed appropriate. It’s unrealistic, but not unrealistic enough to deter me from buying into the idea.) I want to be convinced when people say my writing is good, but I honestly can’t be. It’s sort of unfathomable to me to imagine that my writing is good—or, rather, that it’s good enough to stand out as one of the greats, along with all of my classmates and every single one of my friends. I fear being aggressively mediocre far more than I fear being aggressively bad. Unfortunately, I feel as though I am nothing besides aggressively mediocre.

Part of it, I assume, comes from me having sat with my writing in isolation for too long. I’ve stared at my own sentences, dissected my own voice for so long that it’s become absolutely, mind-numbingly boring to look at. It feels so obvious to me, and it’s why I feel like there’s a conspiracy to hide my total averageness from me: How do you not think this

is literally the exact same thing I wrote two weeks ago? The subject of what I write changes (most of the time), but the way I structure sentences, the way I describe scenes, the tone I choose and the words I opt for and the things I try to achieve all blend together. It’s all the same across the board. There’s no variety anymore, and to me, that means it’s become incredibly dull. Like, How is anyone even able to read this? levels of dull.

The logical response to all this would be, “That doesn’t mean it’s dull, that means you’re consistent,” or “That’s not a really charitable way to think about your friends.” Logic has long since ceased to affect these trains of thought.

I’ve become bored, borderline disgusted by my own writing, the facets of it that I cannot change, and yet at the same time I couldn’t imagine writing in any other way, with any other voice. I don’t want to change, necessarily. I just wish I lived in a world where, if GOOD and BAD and MEH were indelible labels that could be slapped onto people’s writing styles, mine would be stamped with GOOD all over the margins. That would be proof. (Somehow, when it comes to me and me alone, it feels impossible to consider anything outside of black and white. Good and bad. Once I’ve decided something about myself, that thing is unchangeable. I’ve stamped myself with that indelible MEH label.) So I’m kind of stuck. I do like the way I write, but that’s not the same as liking my writing, and something in the back of my head is unflinchingly convinced that because my writing hasn’t been stamped with that GOOD label (a label that does not exist, I must remind you), that means I’m doomed to mediocrity no matter how hard I try.

I want to write. I want to create. I want to touch hearts. I want to speak to someone. I want to evoke, to project. I want my writing to be meaningful to someone, because it’s so close to losing its meaning to me. I want someone with no strings attached, no stake in the friendship game, to read my writing and genuinely think it’s something worth experiencing. But what if my understanding of the craft is too simple? What if I’m unaware of some important writing thing that everyone else learned about in their classes when they were younger? What if I’m trying too hard and it shows? What if, in the end, nothing I write leaves more than a trace behind?

“The fun in making art is about the process, not the result.” Any artist could tell you that, and any artist could tell you about how their teachers and peers and role models told them that, back when they were still inexperienced and clumsy. That’s the ideal, and on one of my good days, it’s still true. But more often than not, I get the most enjoyment out of seeing how people react to what I write, hearing what I’ve done well, because I can’t identify those things myself. And what’s wrong with that? Truly, what’s wrong with writing for the sake of being remembered, for the sake of impacting others, for the sake of being assured that you’re a good writer? Writing for yourself and being okay with your writing only being for yourself—it’s nice, but how many people out there are really like that? I think a lot of writers write for others, and we write to be witnessed. It’s why things like The Omen exist. I would not have written this piece if I was not trying to type up something to submit to Omen 58.3. The purpose of this piece is for others to see me. I don’t think that’s wrong to do. Accepting that—the idea that writing for others isn’t a sin—was freeing, but shoved me into a whole new world of fear, too. Because now I want people to enjoy what I write, instead of just liking the fact that I’m writing.

In one of my classes recently, we participated in an activity where we jotted down some writing fears of ours. Off the top of my head, I came up with seven. We were then instructed to add after every fear, the declaration: “But I will write anyway.” Gently forcing us to promise ourselves that no matter how strong our fears got, we would still write. Even if those fears came true, we would still write.

I know what I ended up writing down was true. I am afraid of X and Y and Z, but I will write anyway. I know I will. It’s the thing that keeps me going, a load-bearing block at the base of my ideal life. There is no possible way I could survive without writing, so I know I will keep doing it no matter what. That doesn’t make it any less scary to sit in a room full of people my age, all insanely skilled. It doesn’t erase the fact that I refuse to let certain styles of writing be seen by my peers because I know they’ll tear it apart. It doesn’t make it any less daunting to welcome opinions of all kinds, lest someone take the opportunity to look me in the eye and tell me, “You’re kind of shit at what you do. You should copy [X person], they’re a real writer.”

The truth is, I’m not really afraid to write. I am absolutely, debilitatingly afraid of what happens afterward. I’m afraid that my writing, such a core part of who I am and what I do, will be pushed aside because it’s not good enough, and inherently will never be good enough. I always write anyway, though, because at this point, there’s nothing else I can do.



Teddy’s 7 Rap Albums for people that want to get into rap (and his listening strategy)

by Teddy Stahl

If you’ve never gotten into rap and have always wanted to try or are just looking for some recommendations: these are 7 albums I’d recommend (in order):

- 1. The Low End Theory - A Tribe Called Quest
- 2. good kid, m.A.A.d city. - Kendrick Lamar
- 3. Madvillainy - Madvillain (MF DOOM + Madlib)
- 4. Aquemini - OutKast
- 5. 2014 Forest Hills Drive - J Cole [you might wanna skip the song “Wet Dreamz”]
- 6. TA13OO - Denzel Curry
- 7. The Money Store - Death Grips

Like any recommendation, this list is subjective and you might not like some of the projects listed above, so I’m including my LP listening strategy to finish an album even if I’m not really enjoying it. I give the first song about a minute, if I don’t start enjoying it by the time that minute is over, I skip to the next song. As the album goes on and if the subsequent songs are getting less enjoyable I start giving them shorter amounts of time to capture my attention, usually going from waiting to see if it hooks me in the first minute to waiting to see if it hooks me in the first 55 seconds and I just keep removing time from there. This way if you aren’t enjoying an album, you’re not spending super long listening to it while still giving the music on the album chances to leave an impression on you in case you only end up liking a few songs off an album. This is the strategy I used when I listened to 219 LPs last year that I hadn’t heard before that year.

Signed, Teddy Stahl 22F 

PENIS
BLAST



Documenting Desire

by Alex Franzoni

Notes:

2 weeks ago I was sitting in Liebling (I work as a monitor there), looking at The Omen erotica submissions when suddenly it hit me: I started developing a fever. In my foggy and rapidly worsening state I decided to take a pen out of my backpack and write the following on a piece of paper I had previously printed a picture on (shown below). This is my own attempt, a sort of retroactive submission into the satirical erotica competition but without the erotica part because as you can imagine the fever eventually stopped me from being able to finish (that’s what she said). I take it that the voting is over by now and it’s much too late for me to win the 30\$ prize but that’s okay because I’ll still be winning the ultimate prize: public humiliation as a result of writing rpf.

Dear Y/N,

While reviewing your FAFSA application our staff realized that you neglected to click the “submit” button twice as indicated by the instructions written at the bottom of the web page in pt 2 white font. Because of this we are unable to grant you aid this year and will have to rescind all former aid. This means you currently owe \$150,000 payable to the United States Government.

Best of luck,

- Joe Biden

WHAT????!! Y/n knew they’d procrastinated on the FAFSA a bit but... not enough to somehow owe \$150k. Right?

2 Weeks Later

Things had been rough since Y/n got the news about her student loans, especially since not even the sleaziest of loan sharks were willing to help her out and *especially* because her mom had been such a bitch about it. I mean... she got that she had fucked up but did she have to yell that much? But it was all figured out now, by some miracle one of Y/n’s friends had heard of this weird lonely documentary director who was looking for a “companion,” someone to “intellectually stimulate them,” or something. Whatever. It was better than the alternative (going back to work at Target). And maybe they would be hot.

Y/n went to go look at herself in the mirror one more time just to make sure she looked good enough to not get returned or something. She’d put her hair up in a messy bun and sported some brand new red lipstick she stole from CVS. She had a sort of 2013 indie sleaze look going on which– maybe the guy would be into? He’s old right? And her look was... vintage!

RING RING “He’s here!” Y/n’s mom yelled. She hurried over to the door, took a breath and opened it. She was greeted by a sort of normal looking guy, a few inches taller than her with a bowl cut and green/blue eyes. He looked sort of like if a fish and a baby fawn morphed into a white guy who was a really hardcore Beatles fan then just hung out for 30 more years until he eventually got really interested in train puzzles.

“Hi, I’m Ken Burns.”

Closing Notes

Since I’m never gonna finish writing this I’ll just tell you all what the plot what supposed to be: Ken burns buys you, you reluctantly fall in love, and then inevitably Ed Windenbach announces that Hampshire needs even more money and Ken Burns has to sell you back (he bought you for like a million dollars or something idk) to help keep the school afloat, but as a final gesture of love he does let you keep the 150k you used to pay off your student loans.



(^ previously mentioned image) 🐑

Section Hate

13 Great Date Ideas Regardless of Your Sexual And/Or Romantic Orientation

by J. E. Cramer; foreword by J. E. Cramer
and postscript by Pierce Docherty

I’ve been on dates with people of several different genders. I’ve been on dates with people who thought *I* was a fair few different genders. I’ve been proposed to from a Dakin balcony on the night of October 22nd, 2021, though my apparent engagement bears little relevance to the topic at hand. I’ve been on dates with Canadian people. In all that time, I’ve learned a great deal about what a *date* looks like—in some circles, it’s a day on a calendar; other times, it’s a decent movie in decent company; and sometimes it’s the beginnings of something beautiful wherein they’re using you for your money and standing and you’re using them as a pawn in your plot to recreate Operation Soda Steal—and not all romantic outings are created equal.

For example, mini-golf: despite the windmills and fountains and all the trappings of a moneylaundering McDonald’s gone technicolor, something to it has always seemed distinctly homophobic. On the other hand, we have roller skating—if my research proves correct, admission to most roller rinks is contingent on being able to produce a Kinsey score of 1 or higher. Though I may be a week late for Valentine’s Day, I have since prepared an extensive list of date ideas perfect for anyone, regardless of their sexual or romantic orientation, so you and the object of your affections can spend countless enjoyable minutes enjoying one another’s company, no matter who you are or who you love.

-J. E. Cramer

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

1. Going to the supermarket and watching the lobsters in the tank fight
2. Pursuing forklift certification together
3. Pursuing one another in a forklift
4. Staging a proposal at an upscale restaurant in order to get free dessert
5. Staging a poltergeist haunting at the Waffle House for the better part of a decade until after countless salt and chili circles on the kitchen floor, hash brown consecrations, and exorcism after sticky exorcism, the managers thereof realize that the only thing they haven’t tried yet is fixing the jukebox, whereupon you and your date can finally listen to “Bert” by Jason Phelps to celebrate a job well done

6. Staging a proposal in Las Vegas, Nevada in the hopes that the nearest Elvis impersonator will somehow know and be compelled to do your bidding until the moment the two of you are well and legally wed

7. Asking one another the Reverend J. E. Cramer’s 37 BETTER Questions to Fall in COOLER Love*

8. *Just Dance 4*

9. Going to the dollar store and each picking out the most concerning combination of items you can for under \$10. Whoever’s selection is deemed more harrowing to think about at length decides where the two of you are going out afterwards.

10. Combat


11. Offering to cut a stranger’s hair for \$6.00; whether they’re paying you \$6.00 for the service or you’re paying *them* \$6.00 for the experience is up to you, your beloved, and the stranger whose hair you’re cutting

12. Discussing the finer points of the witness protection program while treading water in the deep end of your local public pool; the less you know about the witness protection program, the better

13. Seeking out a cornfield and loping through it until hopelessly lost, collecting a few loose husks on your fumbling way back, and pressing them between the pages of an old phone book wherever you find either of your names

~*~*~*~*~*~*

I saw a werewolf with a Chinese menu in his hand
Walking through the streets of Soho in the rain

-Pierce Docherty, unprompted 

*See page 37

37 BETTER Questions to Fall in COOLER Love

by J. E. Cramer

- I: Do you clap along with the double-clap pattern in songs like “Tainted Love” or “Rasputin?” If not, who hurt you? If so, what are you trying to prove?
- II: Have you ever knowingly spoken to someone with a commercial boating license?
- III: Fuck, Marry, Kill: Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll?
- IV: If you could replace all the equipment in any one sport with vegetables, what sport would it be, and what vegetables?
- V: What do you particularly like hearing people describe about themselves?
- VI: What’s your favorite aspect of the place you live?
- VII: Are mountain lions native to your home state?
- VIII: Though mountain lion attacks upon humans are rare, is there anything about you—your bearing, the way you dress, your personal beliefs; anything—that you believe would drive a mountain lion to hostility?
- IX: Can you run faster than 50 miles per hour (80 kilometers per hour), the top speed of a mountain lion?
- X: How would you cook a pasta of the same approximate shape and size of a Toyota Yaris?
- XI: Are you indebted to anyone at the moment?
- XII: Is anyone indebted to you?

After the first twelve questions, take five minutes to write the worst poem you can think of about one another. Read them aloud.

- XIII: What will you remember about me a month from now?
- XIV: What do you wish people in your life would do for you that they currently don’t?
- XV: Name one difference between the two of us that you appreciate.
- XVI: What’s one thing you wish someone would ask you? (Make of this what you will.)
- XVII: If you were to steal something from me right now, what would it be?
- XVIII: Are you the cocaine or the bear?
- XIX: Do you consider yourself brave?
- XX: Name one contradiction to yourself that you find interesting.
- XXI: Remind yourself of something you should do in the near future.
- XXII: What’s bothered you today?
- XXIII: Tell me a story you’ve been waiting for an excuse to tell someone.
- XXIV: Do you tend to downplay or exaggerate minor details in the stories you tell?
- XXV: How did you feel the last time someone thanked you for being honest?

After the next thirteen questions, play a game of Rock Paper Scissors—just one; “best two out of three” is a cop-out. Whoever wins determines which, between your and your partner’s birthdays (month/day/year), will be the latitude and longitude coordinates. Find each other there ten years from now.

- XXVI: (and make sure you read this aloud) Do you trust my voice? Is a person’s voice any metric of whether to trust them, or on the other hand, do we know one another well enough yet that what I might tell you is somehow more credible because it’s me saying it?
- XXVII: Describe a moment in your life you wish you’d appreciated more at the time.

XXVIII: Describe a person you wish you'd appreciated more when you had the chance.
XXIX: Do people tend to mistake you for older or younger than you are?
XXX: What's something you think will have changed for me in my having known you?
XXXI: What's something you *hope* will have changed for me in my having known you?
XXXII: Think about the moss on the old retaining wall, clinging for purchase to every crack in every weathered bluestone, where you cracked your glasses between the graves one Sunday morning, where you and I signed our names in the back of a scuffed-up notebook and spat newfound curses like cherry pits over crabgrass, where I waited two hours one Sunday night beside an empty six-foot hole for you. What would you have buried there?
XXXIII: How long does it take for a dragonfly's wings to harden after it leaves the water?
XXXIV: Remember the dent behind your right ear, smaller than it used to be, a resigned little triangle that still won't sit right. Remember when you were smaller than you used to be. Remember brushing your teeth in a time-streaked mirror over a sink that smells like rust, and remember someone smaller than you, but not by much. Their eyes are blue and their face is round, but you can find one another in the fluff of your hair or the shape of their nose, and they think you're taking too long brushing your teeth. You of course disagree, which you tell them in no uncertain terms through a mouth of foam and plastic, and which they counter by shoving you backwards into the corner of marble and brass, where your head hits just behind your right ear. Do you remember how long it took to clean up the stain you left behind?
XXXV: Remember that time DJ Khaled got lost at sea?
XXXVI: When we met in the tear duct of winter, there was an old door-stop of a book with a glass cover on the floor beside your desk, and it weighed down the carpet like your head on the pillow. Outside the window, thirty-six stories up, it still rained hard enough to crack the ribs of my umbrella, hard enough to float down the street in it like a little red boat, hard enough that I tipped over clinging to the mast at your doorstep. You'd never read it. I couldn't make out anything beyond the title through the glass and under water. You told me you'd sell it once you got the chance—how much did it go for?
XXXVII: If you were to nail ninety-five theses to the front door of my home tomorrow morning, what would they be? List all ninety-five in order.



Can Everybody PLEASE STOP Annoying Me

Thank You

by Jess Lin Jiménez

1. STOP saying we should get rid of Taco Tuesdays. I may go to a small LAC in the middle of nowhere, New England but once a week I am guaranteed rice and beans and you wanna take that away from me?
2. STOP saying you like spring. I know most of you have seasonal allergies. I know you don't like finals. Most people's divs are/will be due in spring. Mosquitos and all the other LOSER bugs come back (spiders are bugs and they suck no matter how many other LOSER bugs they eat - get over it). Ooooooh yeaaah I bet you LOVE filing taxes. Also, there are like NO holidays in spring and spring break is only there to laugh at and mock us. STOP SAYING YOU LIKE SPRING IT'S NOT GOOD
3. STOP making fun of New Jersey. SSRIs are only cool because Tony Soprano took Prozac. (You are allowed to talk about how insane Jersey drivers are. They should feel bad.)
4. STOP. SAYING. POCHITA. IS CUTE. I would elaborate but I'm too angry. STOP SAYING POCHITA IS CUTE IT'S NOT GOOD
5. STOP eating and producing milk "chocolate". It IS NOT chocolate. It is milk, sugar, emulsifiers, and a partially formed thought about cocoa. If you like milk "chocolate", please block me on Discord, Gmail, and in real life.
6. If you come in after me on the rare occasion that I eat at saga, please wait at least twenty minutes before getting food. It's very stressful when other people are behind me. Thank you.
7. STOP. ENOUGH WITH THE OATMILK.

I am sorry if this is mean but I just can't take it anymore. Therapy sessions aren't long enough to explore the mental harm inflicted upon me by oatmilk.



(Oooooooooo You love vocal synthesis and the vocaloid Gakupo. You want to listen to Episode 0 by mathru right now. You want to listen to Gakupo duet with his voice provider, Gackt, in a performance of Episode 0. You think Gakupo V3 is the best voicebank and said duet proves it. You want to help me make a vocaloid club and will message me because I'm too shy to reach out oooooooooo)





OH GOD OH MAN

OH GOD OH MAN

OH GOD

OMEN